

Responsive Management



Indiana Boaters' Attitudes Toward Boating in Indiana: Focus Group Report

2004

**Conducted by Responsive Management for the
Indiana Department of Natural Resources**

Indiana Boaters' Attitudes Toward Boating in Indiana: Focus Group Report

2004

Responsive Management National Office

Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director
Peter E. De Michele, Director of Research
Carol Zurawski, Research Associate
William Testerman, Director of Survey Center
Martin Jones, Research Associate
Joy Yoder, Research Associate
Alison Lanier, Business Manager
Steven J. Bissell, Qualitative Research Director
Ping Wang, Quantitative Research Associate
James B. Herrick, Research Associate

130 Franklin Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
Phone: 540/432-1888 Fax: 540/432-1892
Email: mark@responsivemanagement.com
www.responsivemanagement.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our appreciation to Jim Watson, Ph.D., and Susanna Arvin for their input, support, and guidance on this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	1
PARTICIPATION IN BOATING AND BOATING-RELATED ACTIVITIES	2
ATTITUDES TOWARD BOATING SAFETY ISSUES	4
MANDATORY BOATER EDUCATION	8
FACILITIES	10
LAUNCH RAMPS AND ACCESS.....	11
BOATER FEES	13
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON BOATING, OTHER OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, AND IDNR PROGRAMS.....	14
INFORMATION FORMATS	16
CONCLUSIONS	18

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Three focus groups of registered Indiana boaters were conducted for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) in June of 2004 to more closely focus on some of the responses that were reported in the April 2004 statewide telephone survey of registered boaters and the general population conducted by Responsive Management. Throughout this report, references to telephone survey responses are references to only the registered boaters who completed the telephone survey. The focus groups were conducted to better understand the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of boater participation and opinions on and attitudes toward boating in Indiana, launch ramps, access, boater fees, safety, and information. These follow-up focus groups included two informal focus groups of registered Indiana boaters in Michigan City (MC) and Evansville (EV) and one formal group in Indianapolis (IND). Each group also had canoeists participating in the discussion.

Boaters were recruited for the focus groups by the Responsive Management survey center staff, using the telephone survey sample of registered boaters previously obtained by the IDNR from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles in Indiana. Canoeists were recruited from the general population telephone survey respondents whose survey responses indicated that they had gone canoeing in Indiana and also from the Internet for the Evansville group.

Focus groups are an important method to explore issues because they allow for extensive probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional reaction to various issues—aspects that cannot be measured in a traditional telephone or mail survey. Focus group research is considered qualitative research. Qualitative research sacrifices reliability for validity. This means that although focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as can sample surveys (high reliability), they provide researchers with the opportunity to uncover salient issues (high validity).

All of the focus groups were recorded on audiotape for analysis. The Indianapolis focus group was also recorded on videotape. Analysis of the focus groups is a three-step process. The moderator records observations of the focus groups during the actual focus group discussion. The tapes are then reviewed and transcribed, and the tapes are again reviewed during the analysis and writing of the report. Quotations are always written verbatim, unless otherwise noted, and are written in *italics* to differentiate them from the text.

PARTICIPATION IN BOATING AND BOATING-RELATED ACTIVITIES

A majority of telephone survey respondents (59%) said their boating activity in Indiana had remained about the same over the past 12 months. Forty-one percent of telephone respondents boated to fish, and 38% boated for relaxation. Focus group participants were asked if their boating activity had increased, decreased, or remained about the same over the past 10 years. Most Michigan City boaters' activity had decreased over the past 10 years. Some were boating less because their kids had grown up and had lost interest or moved out as adults, while many others cited work obligations and lack of time. For Michigan City boaters, the lack of quality launch ramps was cited as a great enough obstacle that it may be a reason for decreased boating participation. Michigan City boaters boated for various reasons: some boated to fish or hunt and others to take their kids water-skiing or tubing. Indianapolis boaters were divided on the change in their boating activity over the last 10 years, with no clear consensus among all of them. Most had owned several different boats over the years and boated for a variety of reasons: to fish, water-ski, and tube. Unlike participants in the other two groups, Evansville participants boated more often than ten years ago and boated mainly to go fishing.

And this [boating participation] has changed since my life has changed. I used to boat because of recreation in itself, very much like XXX [another participant] does; now boating and canoeing is a means to an end and the end is fishing. As you get older it's a means of getting from point A to point B on the water where point A might be better fishing than point B. (IND)

I'm like you, I don't boat, I fish. (IND)

There's not enough time, I guess. (EV)

Focus group participants were asked what other types of recreational activities they do in their free time besides boating, and all listed other outdoor recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, camping, and golfing. Fishing was important to several individuals who go boating primarily to fish from their boats. Michigan City participants placed equal or more importance on some of their other recreational activities, other than boating, such as golfing and camping. For a couple of participants, boating was seen as a secondary, yet complimentary, activity to their fishing activity or to their camping excursions with family.

When asked what makes boating relaxing, the essence of relaxation was defined as simply the ability to clear the mind of other obligations. The elements of relaxation included being out on the water, the water itself, and being away from everyday society. Reading, cruising, swimming, and fishing were other relaxing activities that boaters did while out on the water.

You've got the waves, you're out there, it's peaceful, you don't have the hustle and bustle of cars driving fast. You're just out there, and you're just like this all day long, and it's quiet and it's peaceful, so you can relax. You don't have a whole bunch of noise around you. (MC)

The telephone is not ringing. (IND)

It takes the focus off of work. (IND)

The water itself, it's tranquil and natural, and it's just enjoyable. (EV)

It's separate from normal, everyday human society, and it's a natural place that's completely separate from your office so you are able to eliminate those thoughts and concentrate on something else for awhile. (EV)

I like just riding around, whether it is on a lake or river, looking at all of the natural creations and wildlife that are different from what you see everyday. (EV)

Many participants commented that their boating activity in Indiana had decreased over the past 10 years, although for various reasons. Most often cited as reasons for decreased boating activity were not having enough time due to work obligations or natural life changes due to children getting older and having different interests or moving out of the house as adults. In Michigan City, it seems that access to quality launch ramps, a significant issue of concern throughout the discussion, was a direct reason for decreased boating activity. When asked why participants boated less now than 10 years ago, they responded in the following manner:

My kids grew up. We used to tube and fish, and they're gone, and my fishing partners have retired and moved away, and so it's mostly getting people to go out, and work has picked up out at the mill where we're working more and [have] less weekends off. (MC)

My reason is medical. And the ramps we have here on some of the lakes, if you back into it, some of the riverboats, bass boats and things have revved up the engines and stuff to get on the trailer, and they dug out at the end of the ramp so there is a steep drop-off on some of the lakes and can tear your trailers up very easily.... (MC)
Work. (IND)

There are a lot of people working long hours. (IND)

ATTITUDES TOWARD BOATING SAFETY ISSUES

While 32% of registered boaters in the telephone survey said they think that boating on Indiana's waters is very safe, 46% said that it is somewhat safe, indicating that the safety of Indiana waters could probably be increased. Most focus group participants did indeed express concern about boating safety, mainly due to a perceived lack of boating knowledge among other boaters. Jet skiers, watercraft speed, and alcohol were also cited as safety concerns, but the perceived lack of basic boating knowledge and boating rules, manifested in reckless boat operation on the waters, was the primary concern of most participants. Results from the telephone survey also showed that respondents cited reckless/careless operation (51%) and alcohol (40%) as the top two reasons that people have boating accidents. In Indianapolis, crowding was seen as a major problem and a safety issue, in combination with a perceived lack of watercraft operation knowledge.

We used to boat every weekend down at Monroe. We started down there in 1967, and within the last 20 years, it is not safe to get out there on the weekends. I bought an 18-foot boat back in '67, and it was probably one of the bigger boats on the lake, and now you go down there and they've got, my gosh, they've got huge stuff, and they get out there and they plow down the lake, and I've had water coming clear over the deck. (IND)

I've seen the same thing at Cataract [Lake]. (IND)

Yeah, they've got boats that are way too big for some of these lakes. (IND)

I don't have too many safety concerns because I pretty much consider myself an observant person, you know, you pay attention to what weekend [it is] and what lake you're going to, and someone said earlier, it's like Monroe, that bothers me a little bit, especially depending on some weekends because you get so many boats down there. You'd better be on guard everywhere because there are a lot of people who are just a little too much boat and too much beer and it does become a concern. (IND)

There are a lot of people who, watching how they drive, are not familiar with the boating laws. (IND)

Look at how many trailers you see with taillights that are not working. That drives me crazy. It's just a sign of sloppy maintenance, and if your taillights don't work, chances are that something on the boat itself doesn't work. (IND)

Inexperience is a major problem with watercraft. Yes [it's a big enough problem to require mandatory training], the waters are getting so crowded now. (EV)

Focus group participants' perception of an overall lack of boater knowledge about the basic boating rules and regulations could only serve to augment their concerns of safety with watercraft operator alcohol consumption, unsafe watercraft speeds, and overcrowded lakes. When asked if they were concerned about safety while boating, participants responded in the following manner:

I think it's less safe than what it was because there's more of a proliferation of people out there who don't know how to operate safely. I think that's where the problem comes from. (MC)

I wouldn't mind seeing the speed limit on smaller lakes, and I'm a bass fisherman, and I wouldn't mind seeing them go down a little bit. (MC)

All the time. [He is concerned about his safety while boating]. They [IDNR] keep threatening to do something about it [jet skiers riding his wake], and they've done nothing...They could make money just off of that! (MC)

I'm surprised more people aren't killed there [Shafer Lake] every year because there are no speed limits. (MC)

Oh yeah, mostly July 4, ... too many boats, speed boats, too many people. (IND)

Eight-five percent of fatalities in canoeing are related to not wearing pfd's.... Respect the water. It can be unpredictable. It's like pulling teeth trying to get other people to wear them, especially the people I work with that canoe most often. There is a cool image to maintain, and they think they are so experienced that nothing can go wrong...50% of those 85 [percent] fatalities are alcohol related. (EV, canoeist)

I wish there was more classes for boating. You can't get a small craft class around here, it's hard to find, and Red Cross doesn't have anything [small craft class] anymore.... Definitely not on the river, people don't know what to think, the boaters and the jet skiers, they don't know what to think, and they don't know how to act, and I wish that there was more etiquette as far as who goes where. (EV, canoeist)

I think one of the biggest problems in safety is drinking. (EV)

Asked what actions the IDNR could take to make Indiana's public waters safer for all boaters, boaters most commonly said that the IDNR could maintain a more visible presence on

Indiana's waterways. While a majority of survey respondents reported that there was a sufficient law enforcement presence on public waterways and that most had seen a conservation officer patrolling and providing services while boating, 51% feel that *much more* effort should be expended on controlling reckless operation, and 49% on controlling boaters under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Jet skiers were also a safety concern for boaters in the focus groups and the telephone survey, with 36% of telephone respondents reporting that *much more* effort should be expended on enforcing personal watercraft laws and regulations.

Most focus group participants felt that more IDNR presence, more law enforcement, and an increased effort to enforce current laws, especially concerning alcohol consumption, would help to make Indiana waters safer for everyone and control problems with alcohol-related accidents. In Indianapolis and Evansville, participants felt that there was a lack of IDNR presence on the water bodies. Blame for what they viewed as a lack of presence was not placed on the IDNR officers or the IDNR itself, but rather the agency's fiscal constraints. The general consensus in Indianapolis and Evansville was that more of an agency presence would alleviate problems with reckless boat operation and with alcohol-related problems. Participants were also asked what, in addition to enforcement, would they suggest for preventing boating accidents, and several mentioned boater safety training in the form of classes.

Personally, I don't think we really need any more new laws, we just need some more enforcement of the existing ones. The volume of traffic on lakes and seeing people doing some really squirrely stuff that can really result in some bad accidents, I'd like to see that eliminated, or maybe even reduced. (IND)

Last time I saw a conservation officer on the Ohio River was probably 15 years ago, and they never stopped to ask and see our license. (EV)

I think for the square mile, in Patoka [Lake] they do a really good job because you'll frequently see them [IDNR employees] so it's more pleasurable to go up there to fish.... People follow the rules pretty well; but other places you never see a DNR [officer] ever. Like I go to the Ohio River, and it's been years since I've seen anybody, and when people don't ever see them, they are more apt to do silly things on jet skis knowing there's no one around. (EV)

They [the IDNR] probably doesn't have the manpower. There's just a lot more drivers on the highway. (EV)

There is a safety course given by the Coast Guard.... Everybody should have to take that. (MC)

There are a lot of counties in Indiana that only have one conservation officer for that county and he works 9 hours a day just like everybody else.... When hunting season starts down at Atterbury, they pull a lot of them from [other] counties to take care of the boating regulations in Monroe but there's a lot of counties that don't even have a conservation officer at all working—in the state of Indiana. (IND)

Used to be that the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Power Squadron offered boating safety and the DNR at one time, I don't know if they still do. I took it because once I got the registration approved I got a 10% reduction on my boat insurance, and I think that was a heck of an incentive. (IND)

I wouldn't mind seeing one [program] but I get to a tossup between what [should be] required and what [should not be]. (IND)

I don't hear anything from DNR (Indiana). They (Ohio) have really strict laws, and...the American Canoe Association is part of Ohio and even canoes have to be registered, and it's just a much more encompassing organization, it seems like, than here. (EV, canoeist)

Regarding IDNR presence on waterways, there was an unequivocal difference in opinion of the Michigan City focus group compared to the Indianapolis and Evansville groups on whether there was enough IDNR presence on the waterways. While the Indianapolis and Evansville participants felt that there could be an increase of IDNR presence on waterways, Michigan City participants felt there was too much already. The Coast Guard and IDNR both frequently patrolled boated waterways. Additionally, many participants in Michigan City disagreed with the manner in which the boating rules and regulations were being enforced by the IDNR on the waterways. They felt that there were communication failures and managerial overlap between the IDNR and the Coast Guard. It seemed to Michigan City participants that the IDNR placed too much effort on checking for boat registrations and fishing licenses, compared with other rules and regulations viewed as having more importance related to boater navigation and alcohol consumption.

One participant complained about his boat being regularly searched by the Coast Guard for items that should and should not be found onboard. Another participant complained about being confronted about a hole in his boat no bigger than a pen's width and the manner he was treated by the IDNR officer. There were also complaints about "young kids, not even officers" who worked for the IDNR, who warned them about regulation violations that they did not think were correct. Overall, unfortunately, it appeared as though the IDNR did not have high

credibility ratings in the Michigan City area, from enforcement of boating rules and regulations to the agency itself, as being a reliable source of outdoor recreation information.

It's easy for me to find 3 guys that want to go golfing. It's hard for me to find 3 guys that want to go out on that lake, and the DNR has a lot to do with that, what's going on at the ditch. I personally don't like them. We've had them come to our place to talk to us and between wearing the gun and telling us what he's going to do every time we ask him a question, 'you're going to get a ticket, you're going to get a ticket, you're going to get a ticket,' we just, we don't even invite them anymore. We're being boarded all the time at the end of the ditch, we're being looked at all the time by the DNR. It's got a lot to do with 9-11.... It's the Coast Guard sitting at the end of our ditch and boarding every other boat, every other boat. (MC)

The Coast Guard says that's bull [that you need a rope attached to your throw boat]. They don't even know what the other is enforcing. There's two organizations here that don't even know each other, don't even talk to each other. (MC)

Find out what laws should be enforced and enforce them. The drunks, the jet skis, different things like that. To me, it would save lives. It's going to make them some money, that should perk their ears up right there. (MC)

[The IDNR is enforcing] license and registration and life jackets, which is good, but they're using this 9-11 thing as an excuse to be tough, and that's what we don't need. (MC)

The DNR needs to be on the lake; they need to be patrolling the lake, but they don't need to be harassing the lake. (MC)

MANDATORY BOATER EDUCATION

In the survey, registered boaters supported (57%) more than opposed (32%) efforts to develop a mandatory statewide boater safety course that all motorboaters (excluding personal watercraft operators) would be required to take before operating a motorboat in Indiana. An even greater percentage (69%) support (with a majority of 53% strongly supporting) the development of a mandatory statewide boater safety course that all personal watercraft operators would be required to take before they could operate a personal watercraft in Indiana.

Most focus group participants were in agreement that mandatory statewide boating safety courses would be beneficial to everyone on the water, whether a boat operator or a jet skier, an in-state boater, or out-of-state boater, based on their personal observations of boater behavior on the water. However, there was pessimism concerning the implementation of a mandatory course,

exactly how it would be enforced, and who would be affected. Many suggested that the course be required at the time of boat purchase or at time of boat registration. Several commented that it may not be the best option to require boaters with a significant number (undefined) of boating years experience. Several suggested requiring a written test to be completed and passed, similar to that required for a vehicle driver's license.

A couple of boaters in different groups had taken such a course voluntarily and had received a percentage discount on their boater's insurance, an incentive that may be a good option for IDNR to advertise if a boater safety course is not mandatory. In the Indianapolis group there was a concern expressed about the enforcement of a mandatory boater education requirement on out-of-state residents boating in Indiana. There is a danger that, enforcement could adversely affect tourism dollars and result in a potential loss of revenue to the State. Most felt that if a course were to be made mandatory in the state of Indiana, it should also be honored in other states where they travel to go boating. One participant suggested that the requirement should be designed at the federal and not the state level, thus avoiding any inconsistencies in safety laws and enforcement.

It [requirement of boating safety] should apply to all boaters [in-state and out-of-state], period. (MC)

If you have a driver's license from out-of-state and you come to Indiana, you can drive in Indiana. The boat course, it shouldn't go from Indiana's DNR to Illinois's DNR; it should be DNR because that's a federal thing anyway, it should be DNR across the board. (MC)

The other way of enforcing that just might be that in order to register a boat you would have to have a boating safety course...just to register. (IND)

That's not a bad idea. (IND)

I think it's a good idea. It's no different for the young people and these hunting courses. My grandson took it this past year. I think all our young people should have to go through it, and I don't think it's any different from boating; with age limits, you don't have to go through it after a certain age and above. (EV)

I think when you buy a boat you should have to have some kind of training. No one has a clue, they go on the water and have no idea what the rules are. They don't think there are rules when they get on the water. (EV)

Probably would be a good idea for the jet skiers more so than the boaters. (EV)

I don't think that expecting someone to take a class to have the right to use these crafts is the same as making laws that take your rights away.... I don't think it is the same as getting pulled over all the time and nit-picking about little things. I think that education, like you said, reduces the amount of incidents happening, and asking that to be a mandatory thing is not the same. (EV, canoeist)

Inexperience is a major problem with watercraft. Yes [it's a big enough problem to require mandatory training], the waters are getting so crowded now. (EV)

If not required...to make it an awful lot more available to people and encourage people, like XXX [another participant] said, through tax incentives or something. (EV)

FACILITIES

Comments on facilities and access were location-specific and, therefore, differed significantly among the three focus group locations. Cumulatively, there were not any complaints about sanitary pump-outs or fish-cleaning stations, other than to relocate the pump-outs at Ford Marina (Michigan City group) further away from launch ramps to prevent congested boat traffic. Complaints about restroom facilities on Indiana waterways focused on quantity, not quality. A few participants indicated that there were no restroom facilities at the smaller lakes. The only complaint of restroom cleanliness was from an Evansville boater who said he had seen a lot of port-a-potties that definitely were not sanitary.

Most of the smaller lakes don't even have them [restrooms] in Indiana, but in Michigan they all do. (MC)

You've got them at Lake Michigan, just port-a-potties, and they're decent. (MC)

Kentucky is a whole lot further ahead than Indiana [as far as] facilities, clean facilities. It's clean and it's nice. I can't even think, here in Indiana, Patoka [Lake], they have some nice facilities, but like Hovey or just the public ramps around the rivers, you don't have anything. (EV)

I think there's a big difference between the different areas of the state of Indiana. We have a motorhome, and we do a lot of traveling. There are some campgrounds that are great but yet you come to other ones, they're not maintained. I don't know if they are maintained by private outfits, local outfits, or how, but it's something the state of Indiana needs to look at...the campgrounds versus Kentucky and some of our other states. They do a much better job. (EV)

LAUNCH RAMPS AND ACCESS

Fifty-seven percent of boaters in the telephone survey thought the IDNR should spend much or slightly more effort on rebuilding and/or maintaining existing boat ramps. Fifty-three percent thought the IDNR should spend much or slightly more effort on building more boat ramps. Fourteen percent of boaters surveyed said that launch ramps in Indiana needed to be improved. Both quality and quantity of launch ramps were issues of concern in the focus groups, although not as much in Indianapolis. Canoeists thought there should be more launch sites on rivers.

A majority (76%) of respondents in the survey reported that the boating facilities, such as launch ramps, that they used while boating at the body of water where they most often boated were public facilities. Forty-six percent thought the IDNR should spend much or slightly more effort on increasing boating access on lakes and reservoirs. There were nearly identical results regarding efforts to increase boating access on rivers and streams: 43% said more effort should be made. The greatest obstacle to boating access seemed to be informational, such as finding out where to put in, where the best launch ramps were on the closest water bodies and elsewhere, and finding pertinent water and weather conditions. The survey showed that only 6% of boaters thought parking areas needed to be improved, and lack of parking at launch sites was cited as a complaint on several occasions in the focus groups.

Launch sites owned by private entities seemed to be viewed as quite a nuisance because of the launch fees at such sites being very expensive, around \$20 a launch, compared with no fee or a much less expensive public launch ramp fee. (Several Evansville participants quoted a public launch site cost of \$4.) Unavailability of alternative, well-maintained launch ramps or the lack of knowledge of other access areas exacerbated this problem. In Michigan City, participants felt that the IDNR should provide public access in private lakes.

Launch sites were by far the biggest problem for Michigan City boaters. In fact, it could very well be a barrier to increased boating participation in this area of Indiana, as it was a reason given for why some boated less now than ten years ago. While participants said that the IDNR should provide public access at nearby private lakes, it did not seem that a lack of access was a problem as much as launch ramp quality.

I've only got a 20 feet Rinker...I've either got to come to Lake Michigan or pick and choose my lakes real carefully because a lot of the ramps, I can't get it off...I just have trouble getting in and out of most lakes. (MC)

The cement that they made into it...I don't think they've gone far enough out into the lake with it. (MC)

It's smaller lakes like La Porte...on the Sandy Hill River, and we have ramps that are covered with sand, same problem as what you have out here on Lake Michigan, and it is pretty shallow where we have to put in at. (MC)

It's a beautiful lake [Maxinkuckee], and it's a good place to fish. It's a good place to take your family. It's got a nice access, but you can't park. There's no parking. If you park and your tire touches the concrete, they tow you. (MC)

There is no access for Lake Michigan. Very poor. (MC)

It seems like they'd split it up [access responsibilities] between the cities. Lake Michigan gets so rough you'd have a hard time putting anything in Lake Michigan and keeping it very long so they've just given up years ago.... They let the Marinas that are off the Lake handle it, and the Izaak Walton (League of America) and the Lefties and places like that. (MC)

The land has become so valuable, and the state sat back on their hands for so many years, even the ramps that are already on them, these Cedar Lakes, Lake George...most are unusable, they never maintained them, they're letting the marinas pick up the slack. (MC)

I can't think of many places that are convenient for putting in in rivers in the State of Indiana. (IND)

Access and launch sites did not appear to be as great a concern for the Indianapolis boaters, as there were no comments regarding a lack of access or even poor-quality boat ramps. In fact, one participant commented that the boat ramps were in good shape and had continually gotten bigger. For this group, crowding seemed to be more of a concern that took away from the enjoyment and safety of boating in this area. However, a canoeist in the Indianapolis group did comment that there was a need for more canoe launch sites on rivers and also a need for more parking at existing launch sites.

Evansville participants were in strong agreement that there were not enough public launch sites in Indiana and that the existing sites were not maintained very well. Evansville participants complained more often about launch fees than did the other two groups, although it

seemed that most used public access and avoided the more expensive privately owned ramps. Participants in Evansville were not happy that the federal government had built two facilities with launch ramps on a nearby lake and had leased them to a private entity that did not properly maintain the facilities. Parking was rented out to houseboat owners, thus preventing use of the launch ramps altogether. These issues did not appear to have affected their boating participation, however, as Evansville's majority responded that their boater participation levels over the past 10 years had increased.

There's only one actual canoe launch [in Pigeon Creek] and that is where the Greenway Committee has put that in, and there are three proposed.... We get in on just a drop bank, we crawl down on a little piece with rift-raft on it...and there's nothing else. (EV, canoeist)

I don't feel like we're getting our money's worth for our taxes. (EV)

I think your state lakes and your facilities, like that, they do a good job, but when we talk about Wabash River, the Ohio River, there aren't any access [points].... Between Mt. Vernon and Evansville there are not any [public ramps]. (EV)

While most comments regarding access and launch sites were negative, it is to be noted that there was a positive comment given for Bluegrass Lake.

Bluegrass is very nice. Bluegrass Lake, they've got lots and lots of access spots, and they're clean and free. (EV)

BOATER FEES

Most focus group participants did not realize that there had been a recent increase in boat registration fees. Many did want to know more information about where boater registration fees were being spent, particularly the \$5 Lake and River Enhancement Fee (LARE), as some felt this was not where the money was, indeed, going. Several wanted to know exactly what the LARE was. The Indianapolis boaters were particularly interested in knowing exactly where their fees were spent. It was also expressed that not only do they not know where their money is going, but that they do not even know if it is enough to cover the appropriate budgets and related expenses.

I think that any time they make an increase of any kind of registration or license fees or anything, there ought to be some way that they notify you on what they spend the money on. I think that's the biggest beef. (MC)

Where's the \$5 enhancement fee? I thought that went for launch facilities. (MC)

I'd like to know exactly what is the lake enhancement fee. (IND)

I assume they [my taxes] are going for a good cause. (IND)

You talk about you want to have more funds available to pay for things like conservation officers...well, that money should come from the people who use those services. (IND)

I don't think Indiana is any worse than any of the other states, or really any better than the other states, but when you buy these registrations and pay for them and everything, you'd kinda like to know where your money went. (IND)

There are 50 to 1 [people] that use the Ohio River in the Evansville area compared to Bluegrass [Lake], or 100 to 1, and that's where the big money in boats is, and that's where the facilities should be maintained, and they're not by the DNR. (EV)

I didn't know [the fee had been increased]. (EV)

If they did, it certainly wasn't very much. (EV)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON BOATING, OTHER OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, AND IDNR PROGRAMS

When asked where a boater might go to obtain information on how the IDNR's money is spent, most participants felt that if they called the IDNR, the agency would not be able to provide them with the requested information because of known complexities in state budgeting. Many stated that money was collected by various funding mechanisms and then divided up between the IDNR and the State's general fund. Some stated that boater registration fees were collected by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and not by the IDNR. Both a Michigan City and Indianapolis participant suggested that the IDNR provide funding information in a boater regulations booklet or in the fishing and/or hunting regulations publication.

Sixty-five percent of boaters in the survey reported that they would be interested in receiving the boating rules and regulations. Information sources for boating regulations or

boating access were the IDNR or by word-of-mouth, for the most part. When asked where they would go for boating regulations and general boating information, participants responded in the following manner:

I always thought that if you buy a boat, that [boating rules and regulations] should come with it. (MD)

BMV, I'm sure you can get it from DNR. (IND)

I would go to the Internet. (IND)

Web site, local news, evening news-TV. (EV)

There's a number you can call [National Weather] and get every stream in the area, you can get the 10-day forecast on the weather, you can get anything. (EV)

Sixty-three percent of boaters in the survey would be interested in receiving access information on boat ramp locations. Fifty percent expressed interest in receiving nautical maps and charts. Many focus group participants were interested in viewing topographic maps of the lakes and rivers near them. Some had found this type of information on the Internet, from the United States Geological Survey, and one boater in Indianapolis had purchased maps online but noted that you could also purchase the identical maps at Wal-mart. Others were familiar with the fact that you could call the IDNR publications office to order various maps. An Evansville boater saw a list of available IDNR pamphlets in the newspaper. One boater in the Michigan City group even named courthouse records as a place used to obtain access information.

I'd like to see more readily available topography maps of lakes. I don't think those are put out by the DNR. You can get some private ones. (IND)

They've [IDNR has] got so many pamphlets and stuff that you can send off for, and some of it is free and some of it is a couple of dollars.... You can get the maps for different sections of the state. (EV)

I'd like to know the topography of the lakes more, how do you get all of the maps? (MC)

I found that it doesn't do you any good to go over to the DNR. They can't even tell you where you can camp. (MC)

Fifty-one percent of boaters in the telephone survey said they wanted more information on boating safety in general. For focus group participants, the IDNR was not the source to find

information on boating safety courses. Boating safety course information was found in the newspaper, boat trade shows, or the state fair. A Michigan City boater had created his own list of boating safety rules to print out for younger friends going boating with him, especially for jet ski use. A couple of participants in different groups were familiar with the courses known to have been offered at one time by the U.S. Coast Guard and Power Squadron. Comments concerning these as well as a Riverwatch course were positive.

Coast Guard...they give boater safety courses, which if you take you get so much off of your insurance for your boat, and through their course they give you a big book of all of the rules and everything, and when you pay for the course that's what you get, the books. (MC)

There is a safety course given by the Coast Guard.... Everybody should have to take that. (MC)

Used to be the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Power Squadron offered boating safety and the DNR at one time, I don't know if they still do. I took it because once I got the registration approved, I got a 10% reduction on my boat insurance, and I think that was a heck of an incentive. (IND)

The other classes like the Riverwatch that I took are very well received into the community, and any classes that they have are overflowing, and there is a waiting list to get into these classes. (EV)

INFORMATION FORMATS

The telephone survey results showed that most people preferred receiving IDNR information by direct mail (72%), and the focus group results indirectly supported this finding. Most focus group participants seemed to prefer being able to pick up a hard copy of the information they sought, and many had picked up hunting or fishing regulations from convenient locations such as local retailers that also sell licenses. It was suggested in a couple of the groups that there be a business-return postcard with a checklist of informational needs within the regulations book that could be mailed back to the IDNR. It was considered wasteful and unnecessary to send out information to every registered boater because of agency budget constraints and because some individuals would ultimately throw the information away. It was also noted by a couple of boaters in different groups that the only information they had ever received in the past from the IDNR had been IDNR requests to participate in various survey

efforts, for example, harvest surveys. Boaters prefer to obtain needed information in a hard copy format, but do not want to receive a randomly sent, full package of information from the IDNR unless they have requested something specific under specific topic categories.

I get some things from them, but it's all requests. (MC)

Most of them yes [I pitch them] because they want something...to gather some info on the wildlife surveys and stuff like that, but as far as putting out general mailings to let you know what the rules are or something or where to canoe...they don't generally put it out; they make it available but I think it would be cost-prohibitive to mail to everybody. (IND)

I hunt a lot. You'll get surveys from them wanting to know if you've seen certain things...grouse, eagles. (IND)

I don't hear anything from DNR [Indiana]. They [Ohio] have really strict laws, and the American Canoe Association is part of Ohio, and even canoes have to be registered, and it's just a much more encompassing organization, it seems like, than here. (EV, canoeist)

Additionally, several participants were aware of the Internet as an information resource for obtaining boating information (only 20% of telephone respondents said this was the best way to provide them with information on boating). In fact, a couple of participants had used the Internet as a resource for finding weather and water level information as well as for purchasing a hunting and/or a fishing license. There was mixed feedback on the scope and quality of the IDNR web site, and some negative as well as positive comments were received. Michigan City boaters were particularly negative about the web site, commenting that it did not incorporate enough needed information, particularly boating regulations, was difficult to navigate, and, rather than having been designed to provide information, was designed to raise money from cabin rentals and other sources.

Indiana's DNR web site is pathetic. There's almost no information in it, it's a headache to try to find anything, even if you want to look up what your fishing regulations are, just your fishing regulations. I think they've got it down to a half a page paragraph kind of thing, just the basics. (MC)

Their information is just very vague.... That seems to be the whole thing with the DNR here in general; They're vague. Nothing's solid. Nothing's clear. The web site is not clear. You ask them a question; you cannot get a good, solid answer. Everything's just kind of vague. You never really know whether you're doing the right thing; you just kind of hope you're doing the right thing. (MC)

I don't think there's enough information on access to anything where there's the lakes or the hunting preserves or any of that. (MC)

[The web site] is primarily set up to make money. (MC)

The state of Indiana, all of the agencies have pretty good web sites. They made a real concerted effort, ten years ago they started. (IND)

On DNR on hunting they've really got a neat setup where you can get your hunting license...any kind of hunting license, fishing license...24 hours a day. So if you're one of those people who wait until the last minute, like me, you can go in and the night before, punch in all that, get your license and, you're ready to go. (EV)

CONCLUSIONS

Boating in Indiana appears to be largely a group recreational activity. Many respondents boated with family and friends and oftentimes went boating only in conjunction with other outdoor recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, or camping. Most boaters were outdoor recreationists altogether and, hence, enjoyed being outdoors, whether it was boating, fishing, hunting, golfing, camping, or gardening. Many boaters considered themselves anglers first and boaters second. For them, boating was seen as a means to end, rather than an activity in which they participated in for its own sake. Lack of time, family obligations, not having anyone to go with, and work obligations were cited as reasons for not going boating more often. Boating was relaxing because it allowed participants to get away from everyday life and provided quiet, uninterrupted time, and was simply the ability to clear the mind of other obligations. The water itself was a relaxing element of boating that participants enjoyed.

Boating safety was a great concern of focus group participants due to a perception, based on personal observations, that other watercraft operators lacked knowledge of basic boating rules and regulations. There did not seem to be more emphasis on the safety of one user group over the other: both jet skier safety and boat operator safety were important. Navigation rules, watercraft speed, jet skier behavior, and alcohol were all named as safety concerns; however, it seemed that most emphasis was placed on the lack of basic watercraft operation knowledge.

Mandatory boater education classes for boaters and jet skiers alike were viewed favorably by all groups. Suggestions were made to require a written test, much like a driver's license test, at the time of boat purchase or at the time of boat registration. Upon completing and passing

such a test, a boater would receive a "certificate" or license that should be honored in other states requiring an education class. Concerns were raised regarding the implementation of a required class because of inconsistencies in class structure, which could hinder boater participation across state boundaries. There was some concern towards potential legislation that may require taking a mandatory boater safety test too often, perhaps every few years. However, there was overall strong support for making boating safety education for all watercraft operators, boaters and jet skiers, mandatory in the state of Indiana. Certainly, it was expressed that boater safety courses should be more readily available and more visible to the public.

Both telephone survey respondents and focus group participants felt that the IDNR should spend more effort on controlling reckless watercraft operation and controlling boaters under the influence of alcohol. Besides increased law enforcement efforts by the IDNR, several participants suggested boater education courses as a method of creating safer Indiana waters. It seems that with a combination of mandatory boater education and having the IDNR focus on reckless watercraft operation and boaters under the influence of alcohol, Indiana's waters would become a safer place. If boating safety courses are not established as mandatory, a percentage discount on boater's insurance would be a good incentive to encourage boaters to take a course. Michigan City boaters did not feel as strongly about increased IDNR enforcement because they had some concerns about the IDNR, disagreed with current enforcement practices, and reported some negative experiences with IDNR and Coast Guard while on patrol.

Overall, Indiana boating access itself was rated as good, although canoeists stated that they could use more canoe launch sites along rivers. What all boaters agreed could be improved upon, concerning boating access, is making information more readily available for access points, such as location, launch fees, and topographic maps. It may be helpful for the IDNR to take an inventory and map statewide available boater access sites, including privately owned facilities, and combine it with the results of the telephone survey on boaters' satisfaction with access, to assist in future IDNR decision making in the maintenance of existing launch ramps and/or the construction of new ramps.

Most boaters were not aware that there had been an increase in their boater registration fees. However, many wanted to know exactly what the \$5 LARE was for, where the money collected from this fee was being spent, and how their boater registration fees were being spent. They were aware of the complexities of state budgeting and stated that money was collected and

funneled through the IDNR, BMV, and various agencies and then redistributed to the agencies and also to the State's general fund. Some did not believe that their money was being used to properly maintain launch ramps, but did not know how the money was being used. Suggestions were made to include IDNR budget information in the back of hunting and fishing regulations booklets. Costs, in general, were not a barrier to boater participation, though launch fees at privately owned ramps were relatively expensive, up to \$15-\$20 per launch, as cited in the Evansville and Michigan City groups. Boater satisfaction could be increased by ensuring that there are plenty of usable public launch ramps with available parking.

General boating information in Indiana was retrieved from a variety of sources. Although participants discussed calling the IDNR for general boating information or asking an IDNR conservation officer for information, boaters seemed to more often obtain information by word-of-mouth from other boaters, the local newspaper or the Internet (not from the IDNR site). The IDNR may have the information that participants sought, like topographic maps, water conditions, boating regulations, and boating safety, but no one seemed to know for sure, and the focus group participants felt that the information could not easily be retrieved.

Participants wanted to be able to pick up a hard copy of the information they sought, whether it was boating rules and regulations, access, fishing, boating safety information, DNR programs, or nautical maps or charts. Many had obtained up their hunting and fishing regulations from their local Wal-mart, and several had found information in their local newspapers. A few participants seemed Internet savvy and would use the Internet to find water conditions, topographical information, and hunting and fishing license ordering information, but none stated that they found general boating information on-line. It was suggested that the IDNR include a business-reply postcard in its hunting and fishing regulations booklets to allow readers to check off and select topic areas of interest and request information on those specific topics. Direct mass mailings from the IDNR were viewed as a waste of limited agency funds.